Strengthening the Regiment:

Training and Readiness Authority - Plus

By Lieutenant Colonel Diana M. Holland

On 10 July 2008, the Training and Readiness Authority (TRA) policy took effect for the 92d Engineer Battalion (also known as the Black Diamonds). The policy directed attachment of the battalion to the 36th Engineer Brigade (also known as the Rugged Brigade) at Fort Hood, Texas, for TRA with secondary attachment to the 3d Infantry Division (3ID) at Fort Stewart, Georgia, for administrative control (ADCON)(-)/Title 10 responsibilities. There was considerable confusion surrounding the policy in the initial months following implementation. Some thought that there would be no difference and that business would continue as usual. Others believed that the geographic distance between the 36th Engineer Brigade and the 92d would hinder complete implementation of TRA. Many concluded that TRA would disrupt effective command and control and that the policy would be rescinded. However, for the Black Diamonds, TRA presented an opportunity for the battalion to formalize a habitual connection with the Engineer Regiment for the first time since the Vietnam War. Thus, the battalion decided to embrace the policy and forge the strongest relationship possible with the 36th Engineer Brigade. This article explains how and why the battalion pursued this decision and describes the resulting benefits.

Weighing the Options

The incoming 3ID and 36th Engineer Brigade leadership encouraged the 92d Engineer Battalion to shape implementation of TRA to best support the Black Diamonds, so the command group considered two options: One was to maintain the status quo and limit the battalion's relationship with the 36th Engineer Brigade to only what was required by the United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM)—execution order. An alternate approach was "TRA-Plus"[1]—realign as many brigade-level functions as possible with the 36th. The 92d favored the latter approach for three reasons:

- TRA-Plus offered the opportunity to rebuild stronger relationships between engineer units.
- Once the mandatory changes required under TRA were overlaid on pre-TRA practices, the battalion experienced a high rate of conflicting guidance and requirements from different headquarters.
- The situation that evolved in the immediate aftermath of TRA did not appear to be a stable, long-term solution for effective command and control of the battalion, especially considering future deployments of the various headquarters.

Implementing TRA

Some aspects of TRA were straightforward. The policy dictated that the 36th Engineer Brigade would provide training guidance and approve the battalion's training plans and mission-essential task lists, validate deploying units, and review the unit status report. The TRA brigade commander was now in the battalion's rating chain, and the TRA brigade assumed all responsibilities regarding the reenlistment program. In the areas that were specifically tasked to the TRA chain of command but required installation support or oversight, the division coordinated directly with the battalion as though the latter were a separate unit. ADCON(-)/Title 10 responsibilities that remained with 3ID included general court-martial convening authority, installation support, fielding of new equipment, and resources for training approved by the TRA brigade commander. These specified requirements for the 36th Engineer Brigade and 3ID were quickly implemented. However, other areas required further consideration, and until they could be realigned, the actions were processed through the 3d Sustainment Brigade at Fort Stewart.

During this interim period, the battalion concluded that more could and should be done to strengthen ties with the

The 36th Engineer Brigade command sergeant major speaks to Soldiers of the 92d Engineer Battalion during a visit to Fort Stewart.

36th Engineer Brigade. The battalion's leaders used three principles to guide the way ahead:

- Minimize the number of headquarters that handle the same issue.
- Maximize the chain of command (92d to 36th to 3ID) to the greatest extent possible.
- Understand the second- and third-order effects of a course of action. For example, will a recommendation create more work than necessary, and will it stand the test of time?

Following is a discussion of five areas for which the battalion's senior leaders challenged assumptions and made recommendations that would support the Black Diamonds yet facilitate a strong relationship with the 36th Engineer Brigade.

Awards Approval Process

Initially, the battalion processed awards requiring colonel-level approval or endorsement through Fort Stewart's 3d Sustainment Brigade, assuming that such actions would be easier to complete with the headquarters on the same installation. However, with digital technology, geographically distant headquarters could process paperwork just as easily as a colocated headquarters. Thus the question became: Does it make sense to realign this process so that the 36th Engineer Brigade commander approves the battalion's awards? We concluded that it should be realigned, because he was in the rating chain and executed many command responsibilities already. If the award required a general officer's signature, it should be routed back to Fort Stewart and the 3ID commander. Once implemented, this system proved to be very efficient and has reinforced a single chain of command from the 92d Engineer Battalion to the 36th Engineer Brigade to 3ID.

Property Accountability Functions

Similar to the awards process, the 3d Sustainment Brigade commander initially served as the financial liability investigation for property losses (FLIPL) approving official because of his proximity to the battalion. However, as already determined, location was no longer a limiting factor. Again, we concluded that the 36th Engineer Brigade would be the appropriate headquarters to process FLIPLs for the following reasons:

- The 36th was responsible for the Command Supply Discipline Program of the battalion.
- The commander of the 36th was required to approve company changes of command—an event largely influenced by the success of inventories.
- Property accountability is a criterion for evaluation reports, and the TRA colonel is in the rating chain.

Processing FLIPLs, like awards, was just as timely through the distant headquarters as it had been though the colocated ADCON brigade. The revised approval process aligned all property functions with one headquarters and reinforced the primary chain of command.

Installation Functions

The most difficult functions to assign or reassign were those involving installation agencies. Matters such as sexual assault, equal opportunity, the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program, and safety took several months to resolve. At first, all of these issues remained with the 3d Sustainment Brigade in order to ensure continuity. However, it became clear that the 36th had responsibility for these functions and required input. For example, the Army Readiness Assessment Program (ARAP) is tracked through the TRA headquarters. Likewise, the 36th Engineer Brigade commander has an interest in the battalion's safety program. At times, he directs the battalion to implement

The 36th Engineer Brigade commander observes a 92d Engineer Battalion project at Fort Stewart.

his intent for, and report back on, specific subjects such as motorcycle safety and the battle-buddy program. Similarly, the equal opportunity function is heavily shaped and assessed by training—a TRA function—and because the treatment of Soldiers and allegations of discrimination are command climate issues, it seemed best to align these areas with the 36th Engineer Brigade. In cases that required installation support or senior commander visibility, the battalion reported and worked closely with garrison agencies and 3ID. These revised processes streamlined high-visibility functions through one brigade-level headquarters.

Military Justice

The 92d Engineer Battalion command team also considered the feasibility of shifting special court-martial convening authority responsibilities to the TRA headquarters. Like FLIPLs and awards, much of the paperwork could be completed via digital technology. Furthermore, because the commander of the 36th Engineer Brigade was in the rating chain and responsible for the readiness of the 92d, it seemed that he should be responsible for administrative separations and Uniform Code of Military Justice actions. Leaders specifically considered the possibility of a Soldier who wished to appeal a field grade Article 15 and speak with the brigade commander. Such a situation could be handled using telephonic and video conferencing. However, the battalion concluded that it was best to retain military justice matters at Fort Stewart because of the prominent role of legal advisors—both for the defense and the command. This is the only major brigade-level function that the 36th does not process; however, the battalion commander routinely provides situational awareness of legal issues to the brigade commander.

Deployments

As many garrison procedures were being resolved, important questions emerged regarding deployments:

- What would happen if the 36th or 3ID deployed and the 92d did not?
- Which headquarters would cover the functions that were being formalized?
- Were brigade-level responsibilities transitioning to Fort Hood—only to be returned to Fort Stewart when the 36th deployed?
- Which headquarters would have oversight of the 92d Rear Detachment when the battalion deployed?

The battalion leaders pondered several scenarios and concluded that the ongoing realignment of functions to the 36th Engineer Brigade would stand the test of Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN).

- Many brigade-level TRA headquarters were assigning a colonel to serve as the rear commander, and the headquarters retained the TRA responsibilities of its deploying commander.
- One of the purposes of the mission support element (MSE) at Fort Stewart is to execute ADCON(-)/Title 10 responsibilities for separate FORSCOM units on the installation; thus, whether 3ID was deployed or not, the MSE would support the 92d Engineer Battalion.
- The battalion's rear detachment would report directly to the division rear detachment and the 36th Engineer Brigade's rear detachment—a mirror image of the relationship between the units when they were not deployed.

Recommendations

In a previous article in *Engineer*, the authors stated that in implementing TRA in the 20th Engineer Brigade, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, "given the myriad of tasks a battalion faces daily, weekly, and monthly, a good bit of

analysis and common sense was still required to decide which commander would take the lead on a given topic."[2] As it turned out for the 92d, this was an understatement. Every leader and staff officer having to interact with the 92d knew that there were numerous issues that required alignment with a commander, but no one knew enough to consider matters beyond the major functions specified in the FORSCOM order. Therefore, many responsibilities were left undefined, with the understanding that units would deal with them as requirements emerged. The battalion did handle those issues, but each action required time for the staff to develop the process and for the command group to explain its recommendations to other headquarters. Following are three specific recommendations to methodically implement an effective TRA relationship between geographically separated units.

Plan for Implementation

Commanders and staff officers who will be affected by TRA must carefully review the FORSCOM order and develop a detailed plan on how best to implement the policy on their installation and with their TRA units. There was considerable confusion about TRA within many agencies on Fort Stewart. Institutional memory was that the 92d had always "belonged" to a logistics headquarters, and it was difficult to change that notion. Information and reports regarding the 92d were misdirected because relationships had changed. Sometimes, when agencies acknowledged that the 92d was TRA to a brigade on another installation, they stopped sending information at all.

Single-Report Format and Guidance

Leaders should minimize the number of headquarters that have influence on, input to, or require reports from a unit that is separated from its TRA headquarters—or if unable to do so, determine which headquarters has primary responsibility for a particular task and agree on a single-report format and guidance. In the early months after TRA took effect, the 92d received fragmentary orders (FRAGOs) from 3ID, 3d Sustainment Brigade, and 36th Engineer Brigade. Sometimes those orders addressed the same requirement (such as reporting Department of Defense Form 93, *Record of Emergency Data*, updates or motorcycle safety) but contradicted each other. In most cases, the action officers of the different staffs compromised in favor of another headquarters' FRAGO, but the effort required to reach those agreements was time-consuming for everyone involved.

Consistent Functional Chains

To the greatest extent possible, align the major functions with a single headquarters. For example, all personnel tasks for a unit should have a consistent personnel chain. At first, the approval process for the 92d's awards went through the 3d Sustainment Brigade to 3ID; evaluation reports went through the 36th to 3ID; Soldiers were requisitioned through the 36th; and Officer Candidate School packets went directly to 3ID. It took almost a year to align these functions so that all personnel actions flowed to the 36th and back to 3ID. The only functions that were fully aligned along a consistent chain of responsibility upon implementation of TRA were those associated with operations and training—"fair share" taskings, schools, orders, training resources—and it was in these areas that the battalion faced the least friction and confusion.

TRA-Plus Benefits

The TRA policy has greatly benefitted the 92d Engineer Battalion. For example, the 36th Engineer Brigade convened a conference in October at Fort Hood, and all the Black Diamond command teams attended. The conference was an engineer bonding and professional development opportunity that leaders in the 92d do not normally experience in garrison. Similarly, the commander of the 36th, during visits to Fort Stewart or when receiving briefings via teleconference, takes the opportunity to provide guidance and offer professional development to various audiences in the battalion.[3] Finally, as the 92d prepares to deploy to Operation Enduring Freedom, it is able to easily draw on the engineer-specific experiences of other units of the 36th that have recently deployed to that theater. Implementing TRA-Plus has brought even greater benefits to the two organizations by streamlining processes and further strengthening an engineer relationship. The process took more than a year to complete and often encountered institutional resistance, but the results were ultimately worth the effort.

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Endnotes

[1]*TRA-Plus* was a term coined by Brigadier General Bryan G. Watson, United States Army Engineer School Commandant, during a conversation with the author regarding the 92d Engineer Battalion's TRA/ADCON initiatives.

[2]Colonel Duke Deluca, Lieutenant Colonel Fred Kaehler, and Lieutenant Colonel Robert T. Morgan, "TRO [training and readiness oversight]: Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities," *Engineer*, January–March 2007, pp. 11–13.

[3]Though some professional development issues are common to all branches and do not require the specific attention of an engineer colonel, the author believes that there are times when branch does matter, such as in career advice, technical expertise, and engineer capabilities.